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DE RUEHLU #0751/01 3481046
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141046Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY LUANDA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5841
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUANDA 000751

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2024

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SUBJECT: DESPITE TALK OF RENOVATION, MPLA CONGRESS YIELDS
LITTLE LEADERSHIP CHANGE

REF: LUANDA 00740

Classified By: Ambassador Dan Mozena, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The ruling MPLA had characterized its Sixth Party Congress as a time of change and continuity. However, by the time the Congress closed on December 10, continuity clearly had won out. There were no changes whatsoever in senior party leadership, the Congress simply rubber stamped President Dos Santos's proposed membership lists for the Party's Central Committee and Political Bureau, and it added nothing discernible to the debate over the new constitution. The key question of succession to Dos Santos does not seem to have figured in the four day session. During his speech to the closing session of the Congress, Dos Santos said the government should finish its mandate -- a comment many interpret to mean that presidential elections would not happen until 2012, when new parliamentary elections would choose not only members of parliament but presumably also the next president, who, according to the constitutional plan Dos Santos favors, would be the head of the list of parliamentary candidates of the party that wins the most seats in the National Assembly. END SUMMARY.

LIP SERVICE TO CHANGE

¶2. (C) During a Dec 10 meeting at the Embassy, Minister of Housing and Urban Development Sita Jose stressed to the DCM the importance of the Congress's bringing new faces to the party. He said the party had been dominated for too long by "velhos" (old guys) and that the party now needed "new blood." He said one of the party's key objectives in developing the central committee list was to bring in more 30- and 40- year olds into the leadership, putting more emphasis on rejuvenation of the party, rather than continuity.

¶3. (C) Having said that, however, he also admitted that the new Central Committee and Political Bureau membership lists would contain few surprises. In this regard, the Minister was right on the mark as there were no changes in senior party leadership with Dos Santos, MPLA Vice President de Almeida and Party Secretary General Dino Matross all keeping their seats. Membership of the new Political Bureau was replete with the old guard, including Prime Minister Paolo Kassamo, President of the National Assembly Fernando da Piedade Dias Dos Santos, Defense Minister Kundi Paihama, Head of the Party International Division Paulo Jorge, Minister of Economy Manuel Jose Nunes Jr, MPLA Spokesman Kuata Kanawa, and MPLA's leader of the National Assembly Bornito de Sousa Baltazar Diogo. The Central Committee, too, kept lots of old hands, including Angolan Ambassador to the U.S. Josefina Perpetua Pires Domingos Pitra Diakite, and did not include Dos Santos' son, Jose Filomeno "Zenu" dos Santos, as some had predicted. President Dos Santos, who expressed surprise at winning though he was the only candidate for party president, garnered 98.7 percent of the votes (1,964 votes for and 26 votes against out of a possible 2,080 votes in a secret

ballot). In previous party elections, which were done by a show of hands, Dos Santos had on 100 percent. (COMMENT: US Embassy contacts joked that Dos Santos was probably surprised, wondering who the 26 persons were. END COMMENT)

DOS SANTOS SPEECH RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT ELECTION TIMETABLE

14. (C) As he had the opening session of the Congress, the Ambassador attended the closing session, where Dos Santos gave a relatively short and uninspiring speech that recommitted the party to the promises it had made during the campaign for the 2008 legislative elections. He spoke to the need for food self-sufficiency, the eradication of famine, and the need to improve education, health, and other human development indicators. He also spoke of boosting employment and economic growth, building one million houses, and distributing the country's national revenues in a more equitable fashion. Echoing his opening speech, he underscored the need for greater transparency and good governance, gradual integration of Angola into the world economy, and gaining respect internationally.

15. (U) Dos Santos said he wanted the MPLA to serve out its four-year mandate and that, "Everything indicates that the new constitution will change the current government system and set new times for the mandates of elected bodies." (NOTE: Dos Santos is literally referring to the party's legislative mandate; the MPLA won Angola's first parliamentary election in 2008 and holds 81 percent of the seats. The party's proposed version of the constitution

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would have the president be the head of the parliamentary list of candidates of the party that wins the most seats in parliament. END NOTE) Domestic and international commentators interpret Dos Santos's comments to mean that electing the next president would be put off until the next parliamentary elections, which are slated for 2012.

WOMEN ON THE RISE

16. (C) The emotional highlight of the open sessions of the Congress was a precisely orchestrated procession by the MPLA's women's wing, consisting of several hundred traditionally attired women, carrying large baskets and basins of fruits, vegetables and fresh fish as they danced and sang through the aisles of the conference center. In the only non-scripted moment of the open sessions, delegates and observers stood as a body to recognize the moving impact of this dazzling display of woman power.

COMMENT

17. (C) Although party leaders who chatted with the Ambassador on the margins of the Congress and subsequently all evinced grand satisfaction with the Congress, the reality is that the four-day conference, judging from the information available at this point, was entirely scripted with delegates simply endorsing decisions that had already been made. If the Congress had been meant to inject new blood and fresh thinking into the leadership councils of the body, that was not evident as the senior ranks of the party remained unchanged. Nor did the Congress bring any new thinking to the debate on the country's draft constitution or the looming issue of succession to Dos Santos. So, in the end, the Congress was more show with all delegates clad in matching party t-shirts (though the President's was covered by a suit coat) and hats (only the President was bare-headed) than substance, and the big issues facing the country -- poverty, constitutional reform, and succession to Dos Santos -- remain

for another day.
MOZENA